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Wilson: 'W lost my faith MI5'

by COLIN SMITH and A

TWO LUDICROUS blunders and what Sir Harold Wilson saw as a constant whispering campaign against himself, his personal entourage and Labour Ministers led the former Prime Minister to doubt the competence and loyalty of MI5 during his premiership.

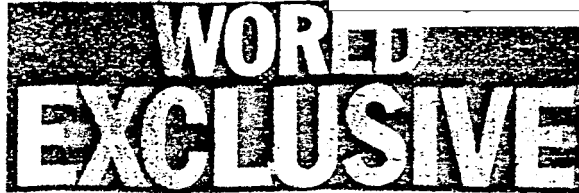
Evidence with THE OBSERVER shows that on two separate occasions MI5 formally advised Wilson that, contrary to their personal declarations, two of his Ministers had connections with Warsaw Pact countries. Both these charges proved to be almost comical cases of mistaken identity.

At one point, the head of MI5, called in by Wilson to explain what the Prime Minister believed to be continued smears against himself and his close colleagues, confirmed the existence of an anti-Labour element within the service.

Sir Harold's suspicions were voiced in a long series of meetings with two journalists, Barrie Penrose, 35, and Roger Courtiour, 36, who, at the start of their meetings in May last year, were working under freelance contract for the BBC. They have since made available to THE OBSERVER their notes of these meetings and others they had with Sir Harold's political secretary, Lady Falkender.

We have painstakingly checked this material. While we cannot be certain whether Sir Harold was justified in his suspicions about MI5 or was merely over-reacting to a series of unconnected incidents, we are satisfied that the material does faithfully reflect the considered views of the former Prime Minister.

The first false allegation about a Minister occurred in



Judith Hart (left) and David Owen (right): Ministers wrongly suspected by MI5 of having Communist connections.



1969, when a Czech defector, Josef Frolik, went over to the Americans in Beirut. He told the CIA, who passed it on to their British counterpart, that three Labour MPs were regularly supplying a Czech intelligence officer in London with secret information. Two were named as John Stonehouse and Will Owen, the MP for Morpeth; the third was never identified.

Stonehouse was subsequently cleared by MI5, but when, shortly after Frolik's defection, the head of MI5 had one of his rare private meetings with Wilson—it took place at Chequers—to relay the information the Czech had passed on, he muddled Will Owen with Dr David Owen, now the Foreign Secretary. At that time Dr Owen was Under-Secretary of State for the Royal Navy and would have had access to top secrets. A few days later, MI5 confessed that they had mistaken the Labour Party's rising star for the elderly backbencher Will Owen.

In May 1970, Owen was acquitted at the Old Bailey of passing State secrets to the Czechs, although he admitted receiving £2,300 from them in

return to power in 1974. In July of that year MI5 told the Prime Minister that they had 'documentary evidence' that Mrs Judith Hart and her husband had attended a Communist meeting in an East European capital. Mrs Hart stands on the left of the Labour Party, and at that time had been Minister for Overseas Development for four months.

The 'documentary evidence' referred to was a cutting from the *Daily Worker* of 14 November 1950, at the height of the Korean War. It was a story about a British Communist delegation laying a 'wreath for peace' at a ceremony in Sheffield before visiting Warsaw. What had happened was that the British Government had prohibited a group of overseas Communists, who had been motor-cycling across Europe with a 'peace baton,' from entering the country. Because of the ban, the British delegation was to join them in Warsaw. The story was accompanied by a rather blurred photograph of a young woman in overalls laying the wreath at the Sheffield ceremony.

In the accompanying caption she was named as 'Mrs Tudor Hart.' This cutting had remained in the security file of the Minister, Mrs Judith Hart, since her early involvement in politics as a member of the Labour Party at Parkstone near Poole, where her husband worked as an Admiralty research scientist.

In fact, the Mrs Hart it referred to was the wife of Dr Tudor Hart, a prominent member of the British Communist Party, who at that time was living in North Kensington. Mrs Hart, whose first name, Joyce, was born in South Africa. She had met her husband four months before at a Communist conference in Prague and agreed to lay the wreath 'to please him.' She left the party in 1956 after the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising, and parted from her husband in 1963.

She now lives at St Monar in Wiltshire and says she was a Conservative. She had no idea that she had ever been under surveillance or confused with the Labour Minister.